

Antonio BASOLI (Castelguelfo 1744 - Bologna 1848)

Design for the Side Elevation of a Private Chapel

Pen and grey ink, watercolour and gouache, over traces of a pencil underdrawing, heightened with gold, within framing lines in brown ink.

Inscribed *Prospetto Lateralle* in the upper margin and numbered *25* in pencil in the lower right margin.

531 x 421 mm. (20 7/8 x 16 5/8 in.) [image]

708 x 490 mm. (27 7/8 x 19 1/4 in.) [sheet]

Antonio Basoli's superb, large watercolours of stage designs and interior decorations may be counted among the finest and most appealing examples of architectural draughtsmanship of the late 18th and early 19th centuries in Italy. In his manuscript autobiography, written in 1821, Basoli discussed in considerable detail his designs for interior decoration projects, wherein he was able to translate his skills as a scenographer into numerous imaginative and varied treatments for a room or interior space. Sometimes the artist created a room in an 'Egyptian', 'Etruscan' or 'Ottoman' style, or else imagined exotic fabrics and curtains alongside precious materials, marble or wooden surfaces and fine furniture. Much of his work as both a scenographer and decorator was inspired by the buildings and forms of antiquity, which he carefully studied in books, many borrowed from the extensive library of the Marescalchi family in Bologna.

This fine drawing of a neo-Gothic design for the side wall of a chapel provides for different colour schemes and mouldings on the two halves of the sheet, with a monochromatic grey and white marble scheme at the left and a more vibrant green and gold arrangement at the right. It may be posited, therefore, that this watercolour was used to present different options to a prospective patron.

This watercolour drawing formerly belonged to the noted English curator, scholar and architectural historian John Frederick Harris OBE (1931-2022). Harris served as the curator of the collection of architectural drawings at the Royal Institute of British Architects between 1956 and 1986, adding extensively to the collection to make it one of the finest in the world. He published numerous books, catalogues and articles on architectural and garden drawings, as well as organizing several exhibitions devoted to the subject in both England and America. As an obituary noted of Harris, '*He lived in recent years in the old Laundry at Badminton…Curiously, given that he had such a developed aesthetic sensibility, his own drawings collection would often echo to the thumping sound of military band music, for which he had an unexpected taste.*'

Artist description:

Much of what we know of the life and work of Antonio Giuseppe Basoli is derived from an autobiographical manuscript, written in 1821 and today in the Accademia di Belle Arti in Bologna. A painter, decorator and scenographer, Basoli is best known for his stage designs and drawings of architectural interiors; indeed, he described himself as a 'pittore di decorazioni da teatro, da camera e quadri di tal genere'. He received his early training, between 1786 and 1794, at the Accademia Clementina in Bologna, where he was particularly influenced by the work of the Gandolfis and the Bibiena family. Basoli was active in and around Bologna for his entire career, during the early part of which he worked as a figure painter on a number of decorative projects in collaboration with the theatrical designer Pelagio Palagi. Basoli decorated the Teatro Comunale in 1809 and worked at various palaces in Bologna, including the Palazzo Rosselli del Turco, Palazzo Sanguinetti and Palazzo Hercolani, as well as several villas in the surrounding province. He served as a professor of ornamental design ('direttore di disegni e ornamenti') at the Accademia di Belle Arti from 1804 to 1826, and succeeded Antonio Sanquirico as the principal designer at the Teatro alla Scala in Milan. His numerous designs for the stage, including many intended for performances at La Scala, were engraved in two publications; the Raccolta di prospettive serie, rustiche e di paesaggio, published in 1810, and the Collezione di varie scene teatrali, which appeared in 1821. Basoli also produced a number of designs for furniture, lamps and other household objects.